



BONHOMME RICHARD'S ALMANAC

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"I have not yet begun to fight!"



SEARCHERS RECOVER JET'S VOICE RECORDER

Story by Eric Malnic, Tina Dirmann and Mitchell Landsberg
Los Angeles Times Staff Writers

An underwater Navy robot, operating by remote control 700 feet beneath the surface of the Pacific Ocean, retrieved a cockpit voice recorder late Wednesday that should contain clues to the crash of an Alaska Airlines jet off the Ventura County coast. Earlier in the day, the Coast Guard called off its search for survivors, saying there was no chance any of the 88 people aboard Flight 261 could have lived.

Later, a federal safety official provided the most graphic description yet of the crash after interviewing pilots of three nearby planes who watched the jet plunge into the sea Monday afternoon.

"All three pilots used terms [such] as . . . 'tumbling, spinning, nose-down, continuous roll, corkscrewing and inverted,'" John Hammerschmidt of the National Transportation Safety Board told reporters Wednesday night.

The voice recorder, one of two so-called black boxes aboard the plane, was found by the submersible *Scorpio*, deployed by the San Diego-based Navy vessel *Kellie Chouest*. "As luck would have it, as soon as they got to the bottom, they found the box. It appeared to be perfectly fine," Navy Capt. Terry Labrecque said.

Search teams still have not found the flight data recorder, which will be crucial to the investigation.

In Phoenix, meanwhile, an American Airlines flight made an emergency landing Wednesday morning after reporting a "stabilizer trim jam,"—the same problem that pilots on the doomed Alaska flight reported to air controllers a few minutes before they crashed. The American crew was flying the same model plane, a twin-engine MD-83, that was being used on the Alaska Airlines flight.

A plane's horizontal stabilizer controls

its up and down pitch, and is therefore critical to maintaining a stable course. The trim mechanism on an MD-83 consists of two motors, only one of which is needed at a time, that move the horizontal stabilizer along its axis.

Although early indications point to the horizontal stabilizer as the source of the Alaska Airlines crash, NTSB officials have strenuously insisted that it is too early to make any determination, and have tried to discourage speculation.

"We are far from pointing to a specific cause of this accident," said Hammerschmidt.

As the search mission shifted its focus to recovering the airplane, the Navy began moving out its big ships and sending in four smaller vessels equipped with special marine salvage equipment.

The *Kellie Chouest*, a motor vessel, arrived with its remote-controlled submarine, *Scorpio*, and side-scanning sonar, which is lowered into the ocean floor and scans sideways for forms that could be debris. Identical equipment was used in investigations into the crashes of TWA Flight 800 off the Long Island coastline in New York and EgyptAir Flight 990 off the Massachusetts coast.

The boat arrived at Port Hueneme Wednesday and deployed the submersible in the early evening. Technicians, using a computer terminal and hand controls, guided *Scorpio* to the debris field at the end of a 1,500-foot tether, said Capt. Bert Marsh, supervisor of Navy salvage operations from the Naval Sea Systems Command in Washington.

Two similarly equipped vessels, the

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Sioux and the Independence, were also being sent, as was a fourth, the Cleveland, a landing platform dock equipped with cranes and other recovery gear.

Capt. Bert Marsh, a Navy salvage expert, said the depth of the water "is out of our range as far as the Navy's divers are concerned."

In one of the eeriest twists to the investigation, the NTSB reported that a civilian on the beach in Ventura took a photograph that, apparently by sheer coincidence, appears to include the Alaska Airlines plane in the seconds before it crashed.

"We do have a print," said Ted Lopatkiwicz, an NTSB spokesman. "There is something in the far distance. We'll blow it up and take a look at it. But I should stress, it's a very faint image at a long distance. If you look at it with the naked eye, you can't tell what it is."

NTSB officials also privately expressed skepticism about a newspaper report that the crew that flew the same plane to Puerto Vallarta earlier the day of the crash had reported problems with the horizontal stabilizer. However, Lopatkiwicz said the agency would look into the matter and interview the southbound crew, which had turned over the plane to the crew that died in the crash.

Alaska Airlines spokesman Jack Evans said the company has no record of problems on the aircraft before Monday afternoon.

CAMPAIGN 2000

Bush Camp Rethinks Strategy

By Richard L. Berke

Hours after his stinging defeat in the New Hampshire primary, Gov. George W. Bush and his advisers began moving Wednesday to contain the damage, imploring supporters and donors to remain on their side and trying to tamp down a controversy in New York state over whether Sen. John McCain will be on the primary ballot.

The advisers say they now must win the next big primary in South Carolina on Feb. 19. and while polls there have shown Bush with a healthy lead over McCain, they began moving Wednesday to avoid a repeat of the jolt they suffered in New Hampshire.

Meanwhile, Karl Rove, Bush's chief strategist, talked Wednesday morning with New York Republican leaders, who have been searching for ways to quell the publicity over the party's efforts to remove McCain from the ballot in many congressional districts. Some New York party members have begun to fear that the effort, led by Gov. George Pataki and other Bush supporters, was backfiring, and Republican leaders said Wednesday they were considering abandoning a court fight with McCain over the issue.

Bush advisers said the issue has been playing in McCain's favor because it fuels his image as a reformer. "We're giving him an issue to beat us over the head with," said one aide.

As part of the drive to stop McCain, Bush advisers said they also were planning to get tougher on the senator on the stump and in television commercials. They said they were weighing such moves as pounding away at McCain's tax proposal and, as the campaign heads to the conservative South, hardening Bush's tone and questioning McCain's credentials on abortion and other social issues.

BONHOMME RICHARD'S ALMANAC

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NATIONAL NEWS

Answers on Gene Trials Sought

New York Times

Federal health officials, under pressure from Congress to explain lapses in oversight of gene therapy, acknowledged Wednesday that they could not be certain whether experiments had hastened, or possibly caused, the deaths of patients other than the 18-year-old man who died at the University of Pennsylvania last fall.

"Most gene therapy trials are done in people with life-threatening or terminal illnesses," Dr. Jay P. Siegel, an official of the Food and Drug Administration, told a Senate subcommittee. "Patients in those trials die. It is usually not possible to make a definitive determination" about what role gene therapy played in the deaths.

Imbalance in Juvenile Justice

New York Times

Minority youths are more than twice as likely as their white counterparts to be transferred out of California's juvenile justice system and tried as adults, according to a study made public Wednesday by the Justice Policy Institute, a criminal-justice research center.

"The imbalances this study reveals are stark, vast and deeply disturbing," said Dan Macallair, who is a co-author of the study. "California has a double standard: throw kids of color behind bars, but rehabilitate white kids who commit comparable crimes."

The study, "The Color of Justice," is believed to be the first to examine which youthful offenders are being transferred into the adult court system.

Defendant's Lawyer Blames

Shooting on Diallo

Story by Jane Fritsch

Acknowledging that Amadou Diallo was a victim who did not deserve to die, a lawyer for one of the four police officers on trial for firing 41 shots at him told the jury in opening statements Wednesday that Diallo's own actions led to his death.

Diallo was acting suspiciously in the early hours of Feb. 4, 1999, said Bennett M. Epstein, who represents Sean Carroll, alternately peering out from the stoop of his Bronx apartment building and retreating toward the door. Approached by the plain-clothes officers, Diallo turned and entered the building, he said, and did not keep his hands in view.

"This is a case about five good men," Epstein said, "and one of them is Amadou Diallo."

But the chief prosecutor, Eric Warner, said there was no justification for the shooting. "A human being should be able to stand in the vestibule of his own home and not be shot to death," Warner said.

Technology Provides Medical

Safety Check On Stock Market

Associated Press

Stocks struggled to a mixed finish Wednesday after the Federal Reserve's widely expected interest rate increase did little to calm turbulent financial markets. The Dow Jones industrial average fell 37.85 points, to 11,003.20. The Standard & Poor's 500-stock index slipped 0.16 point, to 1,409.12, and the NASDAQ composite index rose 21.98 points, to 4,073.96.

SPORTS

Challenger's Cup Series Tied

New York Times

After their thrilling nine-second victory over the Prada Challenge Wednesday in Race 6 of the challenger's finals, Paul Cayard and America One proved once again that they are masters of the comeback. Not only did the Americans recover from an early tactical error, they also withstood a last-ditch Prada charge to deadlock the series to determine the next America's Cup challenger, 3-3. Thursday's race was postponed because of light winds.

Rangers Again Fall to the Devils

New York Times

For nearly two periods at Madison Square Garden Wednesday, the Rangers did everything they could to show the Devils there is not much difference between the teams anymore. But by game's end, the Rangers had still gone more than two years without beating the Devils in the regular season. Martin Brodeur turned aside 36 shots to out duel his All-Star teammate Mike Richter, and the Devils won 3-1, extending their unbeaten streak against the Rangers to 17 games.

Other NHL scores:

Panthers 3 Canadiens 1
Predators 6 Islanders 4

Hawks Overtake the Nets

This one did not seem headed for a last-second finish. Shooting well and defending strongly, the Nets held a 14-point lead over the Atlanta Hawks early in the third period. But the Hawks began to charge, eating away at the Nets' advantage like rock salt on

ice. By the middle of the fourth quarter, the Hawks were leading, and by the last minute, they were on their way to a 97-89 victory.

Other NBA scores:

Kings 113 Pistons 110
Heat 105 Celtics 103
Wizards 103 Timberwolves 93

Precedent in Rocker Suspension

It turns out that John Rocker is not the first baseball player to be suspended for speech.

Almost 62 years before Commissioner Bud Selig suspended Rocker, Commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis suspended Jake Powell, a Yankee outfielder, for 10 days.

Powell's transgression occurred in a live radio interview in Chicago. He used a racial epithet, and blacks in an area near Comiskey Park complained to Landis' office.

AMMO ONLOAD

AOAN Sheryl Lahue and AOAN Kelley Snodgrass put tie down chains on a box during Thursday's AMMO Onload. (Photo by PH3 Daniel Jones).